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the last year of the college or the first year of the professional school, are neutral subjects. They can be treated in either connection, according to the facilities which a given institution may offer. This fact is especially evident in the relation of the college curriculum to medicine, and measurably clear in the relation to law and divinity.<sup>1</sup>

But I am not so much concerned with the adjustment of time as I am with the acknowledgment and enforcement of principles and ideas.

The college unit stands for an idea, guaranteed by a degree, and is, therefore, entitled to sufficient time to make good the demands which fall upon it. In education traditions are precious, but they are subordinate to present values. My contention is that the college exists not by tradition only, but by present values; and that, by as much as it has received through the incoming of other methods and other principles, by so much it is now prepared to give in return, through the reassertion of its permanent and distinctive idea.

At the close of the address the members of the association and their guests adjourned to a lower room, in which refreshments had been provided, and passed an enjoyable hour in social converse. The arrangements for this social gathering were under the direction of Professor Thomas B. Lindsay, Dean William E. Huntington, and Professor Joseph R. Taylor, of Boston University.

#### SATURDAY MORNING

The association was called to order at 9:15 by Vice-President Edward G. Coy. Shortly afterward President Bancroft took the chair.

The first speaker was Professor John H. Wright, of Harvard University.

#### THE THREE YEARS' COLLEGE COURSE

The proposition that the college course for the degree of Bachelor of Arts might well be made a three years' course,

<sup>1</sup> As the subject of the shortening of the college course to three years was the

instead of the traditional four years' course, has now for about ten years, for good reasons, been associated with Harvard more than with any other institution. The president of the university has urged it, at least for his own college; the faculty has given the subject repeated attention, and in fact has recommended the measure. Hence it is proper that the person selected to lead a debate in support of it should be a Harvard professor; and his discussion, to be fruitful and practical, should be carried on primarily from the point of view of Harvard College. The best Harvard officer for this duty (if President Eliot declines it), at least for this audience, would be Professor C. L. Smith. He is a leading member of this association, and Harvard's representative in the affiliated Commission on Entrance Examinations. As dean of the college he has given the question most careful consideration. But Professor Smith is this year in Europe and cannot be with us. I have been asked to take his place. Though I have hesitated to accept the invitation, I have found it easier to undertake the task because of the facts he has marshaled on the subject and the arguments he has brought forward.

Though I am here, then, as an officer of Harvard University, it must be understood that I speak only for myself. A colleague would doubtless urge other considerations than mine, not only in a different perspective but more cogently. I can merely throw out a few hints and suggestions; the occasion and the time at my disposal make impossible an exhaustive discussion; indeed, some important phases of the question—notably such as are disclosed upon a comparison of our organization of liberal education with that in foreign lands—I must leave untouched.

The idea of the three years' college course in America is not a new one. In fact it is older than that of the four years' course. When at the founding of Harvard College the work for the first degree in arts was arranged, it was provided, in imitation of English usage, that candidates of two years' standing might come up for the degree, and for some time afterwards

special order for the following session, any discussion of that subject, however germane to the subject of this paper, was naturally excluded.

the Harvard course for the degree of Bachelor of Arts was not longer than three years. Before the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, it was found expedient, in view both of the deficiencies in the preliminary training of the young men who came to college, and of the lack of facilities for this training outside of college, to increase the time spent in the arts' course from three years or less to four years. This four years' course has become a tradition, and has maintained itself ever since, though the conditions that demanded it have in large part ceased to exist. Nearly all the American colleges—at least until the present century—were modeled after Harvard, either directly or indirectly, and they adopted her four years' bachelor's course. (Let me say in parenthesis that the various names of the college classes appear to contain a reminder of a three years' course. We have Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors, formerly Junior Sophisters, and Seniors, formerly Senior Sophisters. That is, the men of the three years would have been respectively Freshmen, Sophomores, and Sophisters.)<sup>1</sup> It has been left for men of the present century to seek to break with the tradition. Three names eminent in American education—not now to mention others—stand forth associated with this movement for the reduction of the college course from four years to three years,—the names of President Wayland, of Brown University; of President Gilman, of Johns Hopkins University, and of President Eliot. In 1850, at the instance of President Wayland, the authorities of Brown University defined the amount of study for the degree of Bachelor of Arts as “something *that may be accomplished in three years*, but which may, if he pleases, occupy the student profitably for four years.” The ancient names of the college classes were dropped, and students were classified as “undergraduates of one year's standing,” “of two years' standing,” etc. In 1876, when Johns Hopkins University was thrown open, the undergraduate course for the degree of Bachelor of

<sup>1</sup> In Cambridge University, England, the first year men were known as Freshmen, the second and third year men as Junior and Senior Sophisters respectively. The “Sophomore” is perhaps an American institution, if not an American invention.

Arts was arranged as a three years course, the requirements for admission, however, being made somewhat higher than those of other colleges at that time. President Eliot has been interested in the movement since 1886. The conditions and considerations that led these distinguished men to seek to effect a change appear to exist today even to a greater extent than ever before. What are these conditions? What are the elements of our problem?

The elements of the problem are chiefly connected, first, with the preparatory training of youth for college, or our best secondary education, and, secondly, with the present and future status of training for the professions and of the so-called graduate courses of instruction.

The college course of study for the bachelor's degree at present usually lies, in point of time, between two other protracted periods of strenuous study, or at all events after one such period,—a long period of preparatory training on the one side, and a long period of professional study on the other. It was not always so. Until our day, the preparation for college, while severe, was simple and of an elementary character, and could be completed by the average boy before his sixteenth year. On the other side, for the professional training in law, medicine and divinity, never more than three, seldom more than two years were required, and for one great profession, that of the scholar,—whether teacher or original investigator,—no professional training whatever was provided. The result was that twenty-five or thirty years ago the average age at which college-bred men, who had received a professional training, might begin to earn their livelihood, was not far from twenty-three. A great change has come about, the effect of several causes. There has been, first, an enormous increase in the requirements for admission to college, and, secondly, a postponement of the age at which students can enter college. The first change—the enormous increase in the requirements for admission has brought about that a complete preparatory course for our best colleges (taking all the studies together) is today in its range and reach almost if not quite the equivalent of the college

course of a century ago. Both in quality and in quantity there has been a constantly increasing demand upon the secondary education.

A comparison in detail of the entrance requirements of Harvard College in 1856 and 1896 shows that from one to two years more are required to do the work demanded in 1896 than were necessary to complete the requirements in 1856, such subjects as elementary English, French (or German), solid geometry (or an equivalent), and physics, being distinctly added, not to mention the very substantial enlargement of the work in the ancient subjects.

It is unnecessary for us to ask whether this increase is due to the demands of the colleges or to the fact that the secondary schools, high schools and academies provide it at their own instance. Whatever the cause, the increase is something we must reckon with. Our secondary schools have a most extended course of study; only upon the completion of it can young men enter college.

The effect of this great increase in the requirements for admission is twofold: first, the age at which students are ready to enter college has been raised from sixteen to about nineteen; secondly, as I have already remarked, a very fair education is provided in the secondary schools — a much richer, if not better education than that which had been obtained by the boy of half a century ago before he entered college.

When we turn to the training demanded of professional men, we find a corresponding difference and increase. The best professional schools of law, medicine, and divinity, exact in our day of their students, at least three years and some of them are adding a fourth or even a fifth year to their course of study. Further, in the graduate departments or graduate schools of our universities we have not only seminaries for the higher liberal learning but also professional schools — professional for teachers in colleges, universities, high schools and other institutions of learning, and for original investigators in science, history, and literature — where at least three years of work, generally three or four

years, must be done by the candidate after he has received the first degree in arts, before he can proceed to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

In character, too, have these professional courses greatly changed. The splendid advance of science in this century—legal, medical, historical, philosophical, philological—has made itself felt in the great professional schools, which are no longer technical schools, teaching a superficial empiric facility in an art, but rather schools of scientific learning and liberal research, imparting in the mastery of a science new intellectual vision and faculty. Now the effect of all this is that our college-bred professional student emerges (on the average) from the professional school into active life hardly under twenty-seven or twenty-eight years of age.

Of what the college has done in the meantime, I need not speak in detail. It is enough to say that she has extended her domain and the sphere of her interest far beyond their earlier limits. She has opened closed doors wide to new truth, and in brief has made liberal education coëxtensive with liberal knowledge. Indeed, so broad is the field which she has spread out before the college student, that in the time at his command it has become impossible for him to do more than survey a segment of it and to explore more than a small fraction of that segment. She has incessantly modified her curriculum—from its ancient form of a little Greek, a little Latin, mathematics, and the elements of philosophy and of some of the sciences, expanding the old and adding the new—with a threefold result. In the first place, what she has specifically prescribed for all students has been not only increased in variety and in quantity, but has been made more and more difficult, so that the entrance requirements to college have risen little by little to meet this demand. In the second place, the conception of a college course as made up of a certain number of specified studies, done in a set sequence in a set period of time, she has completely shattered. She has taught us that many roads lead toward the Rome of what we call a liberal education. Further, in the third place, she has

added constantly to the facilities for study and research, introducing new branches of science and learning, until it comes about that there are now (in such colleges as Yale or Harvard) offered the student in amount some fifteen or twenty times the instruction he can himself receive, and much of this of a very advanced character. She has brought home the truth that after the student has completed the work in his power within the period of his college course, there is still before him and awaiting him a vast body of liberal learning which stirs his ambition, and often demands his devotion. It reminds him that the bachelor's degree is after all only a first degree in arts, and in the natural course of development she has brought into being a higher stage of liberal education—that which for want of a better name we call “graduate study,” what President Tucker last evening described as “university” study. In fact, as Professor Smith has said, “the course of liberal training is now no longer a matter of four years, but of five, six or seven years.”

These, then, are the features of the present situation—a preparatory course which keeps our youth at school until they are nineteen years of age, a college course which keeps them in college four years longer—even then with imperfectly fulfilled ambitions for liberal study—a professional stage of training of from three to four years. Your college-trained professional man is from twenty-seven to twenty-eight years of age before he goes into life. The period of infancy is prolonged most unduly.

What is to be the outcome? If this system remains as it is, these results are likely to follow: Men will pass directly from the secondary schools to the professional schools and will omit the college course. That is, the professions will be more and more recruited from men without college training, and the college as a preparation for the professional school will sink in importance, especially as the secondary instruction furnished by our high schools and academies is improved. The resort to college will in general diminish, and those mainly will seek a college education who have leisure and wealth and can wait.

It is a question whether this change is not even now in



progress. Are as many men, relatively speaking, going to college today as fifty years ago? Other things being equal, with the general increase and diffusion of wealth, with the sharper demand for the best educated men in the professions, the proportion of college men in the community should increase instead of fall off. It should at least keep up with that of professional men.

The importance of a sound college training for as many as possible of our young men, without differences due to wealth or other adventitious circumstances, I need not urge in this presence, especially after the eloquent and impressive words we listened to last evening. It is only as a considerable proportion of her citizens are educated in the largest way that the republic can fulfill her destiny or even maintain her existence. We need many men in every community educated solidly and broadly, men of disciplined, well-informed and open minds, able intelligently to face the grave and intricate problems of modern society and life,—thus educated to leadership. We cannot afford to allow the college to sink in importance; rather than suffer the college to cease to be a supreme attraction for all ambitious young men of good parts, we must be willing to make concessions, at least such as will not threaten her integrity or mar her ultimate usefulness, certainly such as will strengthen her in the community and perpetuate her influence. We are in a better position to make concessions now than ever before, with a vastly enriched secondary education, with a liberalized professional education, and with the great opportunities for advanced study that are afforded in the graduate departments of our universities.

If we are to make the changes that will draw to our colleges the largest possible number of men and keep them there a convenient season, sending them out into life at a suitable age, and not when in comparison with other young men they make the appearance of belated laggards in life's race, we must do at least one of three things. We must shorten either the period of preparation for college, or the period of college study, or that

of professional study. The first of these three things—the reduction of the time of the preparation for college—could be accomplished in one or in both of two ways. We might either crowd or condense the present requirements into a shorter period by a wise and more economical distribution of the work throughout the whole extent of the boy's education, or we might lower the requirements for admission. The result of either process would be the admission to college of young men a year or two younger than they now enter college, at about sixteen or seventeen instead of eighteen or nineteen.

That something can be done in the way of condensing the present requirements into a shorter period, I dare say we all will agree. It is one of the burning questions of the secondary education today. But when we consider the extent of the college requirements, whether very much could be done in this way is more than doubtful. That on the other hand we should undertake any substantial reduction, in quantity, of the college requirements I for one do not hope nor desire. At present these requirements represent as a rule the most and the best that the better high schools and other secondary schools can do in the way of furnishing an education—President Gilman's "essential education"—for the young people of our communities, many of whom can never expect to go to college. To reduce materially the requirements for admission would be to lower the standard of performance of the schools. It would strike a blow at popular education. It might increase the number of persons to go to college, but it would do this to the injury of a very much larger number. No! We cannot afford to take the alternative of materially reducing the requirements for admission.

The third step—that of reducing the period of professional training—is absolutely beyond our power, even if we were disposed to take it. The tremendous demands of society for men with the most thorough and extended professional equipment, the keen competition that exists in all the professions, the enlargement of the scope of the professions, due in part to the

enlargement of scientific knowledge, in part to the general expansion of modern life—all these things will tend hereafter to extend rather than to abbreviate the period of professional study. The experience of foreign nations shows this most conclusively.

There seems, then, in my opinion, but one thing to be done—we must so compress or reduce the college course that men may be enabled to complete it in a less period than four years; in short, we must establish as a natural and normal thing the three years' college course.

Some such general considerations as these, with others that I shall incidentally name later, have led the friends of the three years' course in the Harvard faculty to undertake the practical solution of the problem for students in their college. It is worth while to state here in outline what this attempt has been, although the attempt has not been wholly successful.

The work prescribed for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Harvard College is now made up of eighteen so-called "courses" of instruction, distributed roughly as follows:

5 in Freshman year;  $4\frac{1}{2}$  in Sophomore year;  
 $4\frac{1}{2}$  in Junior year; 4 in Senior year.

Each "course" consists of three hours each week of lectures or recitations throughout the year, and each of these hours normally requires on an average not less than two additional hours of private, preparatory or supplementary study or of laboratory work. Thus in Freshman year the student has regularly fifteen hours' recitation or lectures each week, with thirty more of study or laboratory work—forty-five in all. In Sophomore and Junior years the number of hours each week becomes approximately thirteen and a half for lectures and recitations, with twenty-seven additional—forty and a half. In Senior year, we have twelve hours, with twenty-six additional, thirty-eight each week.

Now we have found that, in our flexible system of elective studies, many ambitious and capable students are able to do, and often do very well, more work than this, and that by the end of the college year some of them will come out with a credit

of five or six courses- instead of the five, four and a half, and four, that are required of them. Thus at the close of the Junior year some of them will have to their credit eighteen courses, an amount accomplished in three years that their less active classmates are taking four years to do. Men, further, who at entrance are able to anticipate a part of the work of the first year and to pass examinations on it, find it still easier to complete the eighteen courses in three years.

What happens then? What do we do with the men who have completed these eighteen courses in three years? In the first place, the cases of all such are treated individually, and are carefully examined by the dean and administrative board of the college, as they formerly were, by a special committee charged with this duty. Men who at the end of Junior year have completed eighteen courses well, and can show cause why they should be allowed to leave college then, are either recommended for the degree of Bachelor of Arts at that time, if they desire it, or obtain leave of absence and receive their degree a year later with their four years' course classmates. Many such students, while on leave of absence, enter a professional school or the graduate school. Other students of this category, who prefer to remain in residence as Seniors, often continue study on advanced lines, and are able to complete in one year the additional requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (one year or four courses of advanced special studies), having at the close of their Senior year to their credit twenty-two or more courses. They receive at that time the degree of Bachelor of Arts with their classmates, and a year later that of Master of Arts, without further residence or study.

There are, thus, to sum up, of the students who complete by the close of their third year in college the quantitative requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, two groups, the second being subdivided: First, those who graduate then and receive the A.B. degree; secondly, those who receive the A.B. degree a year later with their classmates, but either are absent from the university, or remain in the university and often do additional

work, upon which some of them receive the degree of Master of Arts two years later.

These arrangements might seem to be sufficient, and for men of exceptional ability, who can crowd into three years good work to which the average man is expected to devote four years, they are perhaps, sufficient; but they are unsatisfactory for the normal student. It has been found that though he can complete the work in three years, this work is more than he can do well in that time. Hence the faculty, as far back as 1889 was led to take an additional step: it then recommended that the total requirement for the degree should be slightly reduced, should be made sixteen instead of eighteen courses, believing that while eighteen courses made too large an amount to be covered well in three years, sixteen might be so covered. Put briefly, the faculty recommended that the requirement for the degree should be reduced by one-ninth. This recommendation was opposed by a strong minority of the faculty, but was adopted by the corporation; it failed, however, to receive the approval of the board of overseers, and, of course, has never gone into effect.

The three years' course at Harvard, as now actually provided, consists, then, in the permitted compression of the work of four years into three. The three years' course which many members of the faculty would like to see established is one where students should be allowed and encouraged to do in three years work hitherto done in three and a half years.

Experience has shown that the three years' course is practicable, at least at Harvard College. I believe when all the considerations, pro and con, are weighed, it will appear to be desirable, certainly for four-fifths of the students in college—that is, for those who expect to continue their study either in the professional or in the graduate school; and expedient for the others—one-fifth the number—who, for various reasons, must enter active life at once.

I will not, of course, deny that a student can do more and gain more in four years than in three, and that there are some advantages to some students in deliberately browsing through

college ; but with the great advance in entrance requirements, and with the serious character of college work, it becomes a grave question, quite independently of the considerations thus far urged, whether, after all, the fourth year would not be better spent in other associations than those of undergraduate life — in the professional school, in the graduate school, where, for many different reasons, a different atmosphere prevails. And there are in every college not a few men, greatly benefited by the associations of college life and entitled to recognition, for whom four years in college is altogether too long a period. Their age, or their temperament, makes it highly desirable that they should not too late be subjected to the responsibilities and higher education of active life.

The privilege of completing the college course in three years, now open to Harvard students, though still under unfavorable conditions, has not as yet touched a large proportion of the undergraduates ; and, indeed, the three years' bachelor's course is, for various reasons, unpopular with college students. This is, I believe, one of the signs that there is little danger that the period of truly liberal study for the great mass of students, at least for those who can most profit by it, would be diminished if the course were shortened. The first degree in arts obtained in three years, many young men will find it natural to seek to proceed at least to the second degree (if not further), and to devote one or two years to study in the graduate departments of our universities there to qualify themselves for their work as teachers, as writers, as men of science, far more effectively than if they had remained in the college as undergraduates. This increased resort to the graduate schools would tend to develop and strengthen the higher learning with us, a consummation devoutly to be wished ; it would provide leadership for the leaders in modern society and thought.

The danger to our higher education to be apprehended from the general reduction of the college course to three years, is to be apprehended only in the case of colleges where the entrance requirements are below the provision of our better secondary edu-

cation, or where high entrance requirements cannot be rigidly enforced. Such colleges must keep the four years in order to maintain the integrity of the system. The first year, in these instances, must be one in which, as an eminent professor once described the Freshman year in his college, "the young men are licked into shape." But let us hope that the day is approaching when all our better colleges shall have similar requirements for admission, which shall be identical with a suitable amount of the best work in our high schools and academies. Then can all the colleges proceed hand in hand. The precious fourth year will not be lost. The better colleges, even the smaller ones, by the intellectual necessities of the life of the competent college professor, will provide for the more ambitious of their students, as they have already provided, from one year to two years of advanced liberal study beyond the requirement for the bachelor's degree, and will mark the satisfactory completion of the studies of this supplementary period by the bestowal of the degree of Master of Arts.

I have, I fear, only outlined an argument in support of the proposition upon which I have spoken. There are other arguments, other considerations; but these are the considerations that have led me, as a member of the Harvard faculty, to seek to render it easier for college students to complete their course in three years. The controlling motive in all this movement is the desire to make the college more and more of a power in our national life.

The second speaker, upon the same subject, was Professor Thomas D. Seymour of Yale University.

#### THE THREE YEARS' COLLEGE COURSE

As we listened last evening to President Tucker's charming address, I thought that after his convincing statement of the important function of the college as a bulwark against the dangers of specialization, I might almost say with "my double," "there has been so much said, and so well said, that I will not